

AUTHOR Langley, Anne; And Others  
TITLE Journals Online News: Dispersing Collection Management Information on the World Wide Web.  
PUB DATE 96  
NOTE 5p.; A downloaded version of one of 29 conference papers (for those in ERIC, see IR 056 258-274) placed on the Internet under the following overall title: "Untangling the Web. Proceedings of the Conference Sponsored by the Librarians Association of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Friends of the UCSB Library" (Santa Barbara, CA, April 26, 1996).  
AVAILABLE FROM Electronic version:  
<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/untangle/>  
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Academic Libraries; \*Computer Mediated Communication; \*Computer System Design; Higher Education; Hypermedia; Internet; \*Library Collection Development; Library Services; Online Systems; \*Periodicals; \*Scholarly Journals; \*World Wide Web  
IDENTIFIERS \*University of Tennessee Knoxville; Web Sites

## ABSTRACT

Journals Online News (JON) is a World Wide Web site created and maintained by the Collection Development Team at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) Libraries in order to speak with the UTK community about journals-related issues. Its primary function at present is to provide UTK faculty and other interested parties with the latest information about the ongoing journals review and cancellation project, and to serve as a conduit for transmitting the faculty's concerns about that process to the appropriate library staff. The process of creating JON began with hiring a student assistant as a website creator and administrator. JON went online in the summer of 1995, but as the deadline for submission of titles approached, University administrators ended the review; the Chancellor had received a letter from a faculty member pleading that UTK not become a "University of Mediocrity." The University managed to produce \$250 in one-time money to supplement the journals fund and the shortfall of nearly \$400,000 was covered with endowed funds. A one-year evaluation cycle was launched to identify less-needed titles. To accommodate faculty who are computer-shy or have no network connection, one copy of all the lists was printed after day after each update, and placed in a binder in the reserve room. To keep JON readable and user-friendly through either browser or interface, graphics were kept to a minimum. Each page of JON provides an e-mail link so that faculty can send comments about lower-priority titles, which are also active hypertext links with detailed information about the journal in question. (AEF)

## Untangling the Web

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# Journals Online News: Dispersing Collection Management Information on the World Wide Web

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## Abstract

Journals Online News (J.O.N.), a world wide web site created and maintained by the Collection Development Team at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Libraries, informs university faculty, library selectors, and interested students and staff about journals cancellation/review information. Like libraries everywhere, the UTK Libraries are grappling with the serials crisis in academic publishing. In order to involve the faculty in serials management decisions, we decided to take advantage of a unique quality of the Internet--interactive communication. Using the Internet, we can provide the most up-to-date information quickly to a wide audience, and they can respond just as quickly and easily. Thus we eliminate confusion, reduce paper and mailing costs, save time, and enhance communication between the Libraries and our users.

Journals Online News (JON) is a world wide web site (<http://toltec.lib.utk.edu/~jon>) created and maintained by the Collection Development Team at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Libraries in order to speak with the UTK community about journals-related issues. Its primary function at present is to provide UTK faculty and other interested parties with the latest information about our ongoing journals review and cancellation project, and to serve as a conduit for transmitting the faculty's concerns about that process to the appropriate library staff. The unique properties of the world wide web allow us to achieve both of these goals with a minimum of paperwork and confusion.

In some respects JON is the result of what we've learned from all the mistakes and complications that occurred in the past. UTK Libraries undertook its first journals cancellation project in 1979. Another followed in '81, and since then we have had formal cancellation projects every three to four years. The last mass cancellation was in 1991.

In 1991, faculty were used to this process but no less accepting of it. The journals collection had been reviewed, and cut so often that there was little left outside the "core." Most of the housekeeping was done; gifts and

, cessations were identified and bibliographic and holdings records were edited. Programs and priorities change, of course. Titles continue to cease, merge and split. But the idea that we could cancel enough titles to balance the serials budget struck fear into the hearts of faculty and researchers.

Nevertheless, we forged on. The review of 1991 produced an ocean of paper. Collection Development decided that in order to target the faculty reviewers more narrowly, we would divide the subscription list into funds that correspond to the categories we use for firm order allocations. These funds are the basis for the liaison between Faculty Library Representatives and Library Selectors. Extending these codes to the journals list used this familiar categorization and helped us get relevant lists to the right faculty.

But what a chore it was! The lists had to be produced quickly. We used dBase, loaded data from Faxon to create most of the price fields, and assigned fund codes. We used purchase order numbers as the unique identifier. Since we had records to create for 7000 titles, work progressed somewhat sloppily. Fund codes were assigned by student assistants, resulting in such anomalies as *The Journal of Physiology* in the Physics fund. The database soon was nicknamed "Biglist."

The greatest problem with Biglist was that its product was paper. This created a situation in which many versions of the same information were floating around. Some journals developed reputations; they drifted from list to list as selectors and representatives shuffled titles. *Architectural Digest* was cancelled by Architecture, reinstated by Interior Design, put up for cancellation again, transferred to General Social Sciences, then transferred to General Humanities. It finally found a home in the General fund with all those other "popular" and multidisciplinary titles that are "for the Libraries" because no one wants them on their subject lists. Other interdisciplinary titles, like *International Journal of the Addictions* and *Journal of Gerontology* faced the same wandering fate.

Biglist lives on today as the core of the fund lists in JON. In the interim between cancellation projects it was enhanced and expanded in scope. At the end of the '91 project, without a moment's rest, CD staff continued to work on Biglist. The quality and accuracy of the information has been improved. It now includes publishers, five-year price histories, Journal Citation Rankings, UTK dissertation citation counts, and information on five year's worth of actions--cancellations, reinstatements, mergers, cessations, twigging, etc. It was used to produce "core lists" for a pilot journals analysis project. Today it is an even Biggerlist with 9,730 records.

As we began planning for the Cancellations of 1996 (which turned into the Cancellations of 1997--more on that later) a survey of satisfaction with the '91 procedures delivered the loud and clear message that multiple versions of lists were the biggest problem. Since we have to use a paper product to communicate with at least some of our faculty, especially those without network or computer access, we knew we could not completely solve this problem. But we nevertheless hatched the idea of creating an accessible, shared database of authoritative information on lists and actions, and thus was born Journals Online News.

The process of creating Journals Online News began with hiring a student assistant, Jon Wallace, as website creator and administrator. After initial discussions to sketch the concept, and a couple training sessions for instruction in HTML, Jon was off into web creativity land. In fact, he sort of became obsessed, which is one of the reasons JON is such an attractive and useful site. Jon maintained from the beginning that JON should contain more than cancellations-related information, and instead should be a global resource for information about journals. He held firmly to this vision of scope, and created prototype pages designed to demonstrate the concepts. After initial efforts to create a GIF, load the core data, and provide links to enriched information about journals, we put the prototype out for review by library selectors. Most of them liked it; a couple loved it; a few more hated it.

Not everyone loved our first graphic, so design of a new one was a quick, early compromise. Some selectors were adamant that the site should focus upon cancellations "so as to not deflect attention away from this serious issue." Since widening knowledge about journals access was just what we had in mind we decided to enlarge the scope. We knew, since our remaining journals collection was "core" in many areas, that we could not promote doing without the information. Instead, we would have to encourage faculty to change their patterns of scholarly research, to find new ways to browse, and to take advantage of state-of-the-art means of article delivery in lieu of subscriptions. JON seemed the perfect vehicle to bring word of the possibilities of this new era. Those who used JON online were the perfect audience for our efforts, since they had computer access, were comfortable in an electronic, interactive environment, and were likely to be more adventuresome and take more risks.

Plans for cancellations and the development of JON were accompanied by several other events. We had successfully built a purchasing coalition among the Libraries, some academic departments, and the Office of Research Administration to obtain networked distribution of Current Contents. This provided access to a large and powerful database of information about recent periodical literature to anyone on campus with a network connection; others could use Current Contents from Libraries workstations. At the same time, Interlibrary Services underwent workflow studies which allowed it to improve its turnaround time and to increase its success in obtaining articles. Meanwhile, a series of publications paved the way for JON. *Context*, a campus newspaper for faculty and staff, carried articles about Current Contents and improvements in interlibrary loan. An occasional newsletter from the Libraries, *Information Issues*, published information on the state of journal publishing, including price trends and projected increases.

JON went online in the summer of 1995 after an announcement in *Information Issues*, and we began to post lists, submitted by selectors, of titles that were being considered for cancellation in 1996. But just as we neared our deadline for submission of titles, University administrators ended our review. The Chancellor had received a letter from a faculty member and was struck by the sincerity of his plea that we not become a "University of Mediocrity." The University, though in dire financial straits, managed to produce \$250,000 in one-time money to supplement the journals fund. We expected a shortfall of nearly \$400,000, and decided to cover it using endowed funds.

Barring another last-minute deliverance, however, cancellations will become necessary in the next fiscal year. But the reprieve gave us breathing space. We responded by launching a one-year evaluation cycle, which we intend to continue on a permanent basis, in order to identify less-needed titles. Information about all these occurrences, including a [calendar for the evaluation plan](#), was posted in JON as soon as it became available. After a period of several months analysis, including a faculty survey to identify essential titles, selectors, in consultation with their faculty representatives, identified 30 percent (in dollars) of each library fund code as lower-priority titles. In most cases, these lists were further subdivided into three increments of 10 percent each, with the first increment being the titles most likely to be cancelled, and so on.

An article in *Context* reminded the faculty about JON and explained its features, and the lists were posted for review. Although technically due on Jan. 15, the lists drifted in over a period of two and a half months; many lists were revised as problems cropped up or faculty objected to the inclusion of certain titles. This was the sort of thing that caused such headaches during earlier cancellation projects, but with JON it was easy to keep a handle on frequently changing information. At first JON was updated twice a month to incorporate the latest changes and additions; as the end of the journals evaluation period approached, we increased the frequency to once a week. To accommodate faculty who are computer-shy or have no network connection, we printed one copy of all the lists the day after each update, and placed them in a three-ring binder in the reserve room.

A word about the nuts and bolts of JON is in order. Our University supports two very different web browsers--Netscape on public workstations and in some faculty and staff offices, and Lynx (a text-only browser) within "e-mail" accounts on Unix and Vax platforms--and we judged that faculty, many of whom do not yet have the ethernet connections in their offices that are required for Netscape, would in many cases access JON via Lynx. Thus we set out to make JON readable and user-friendly through either browser interface. This meant keeping graphics to a minimum, and dispensing with imagemaps, frames, and other bells and whistles. The task was greatly aided by the WN httpd server software installed on our Unix world wide web server, which allows us to serve different versions of a document to different browsers.

The lower-priority titles are organized in three ways. From JON's "[Journals Review Page](#)," the user may select a "[Fund Code List](#);" the links on that page lead to lists of the lower-priority titles identified in individual fund codes. Choosing the "[Complete Alphabetical List](#)" will produce a compendium of all the lower-priority titles identified to date, in every fund code. Finally, "[New Titles](#)" leads to a list of all the lower-priority titles added to JON in the most recent update, organized by fund code. These three pages are connected both vertically to the "Journals Review Page" and laterally to one another by means of a menu bar (Netscape) or link menu (Lynx).

The lower-priority titles themselves are also active hypertext links which lead to detailed information about the journal in question, including price history, publisher, full-text availability, and more; this information is stored in UTK Libraries database, [Mockingbird](#), which is in turn derived and updated from Biglist.



Each page of JON provides an e-mail link so that faculty and others can send us their comments about the lower-priority titles. Rather than use the usual hypertext mailto protocol, we channel the e-mail through a CGI script so that it actually originates on our own server; this allows us to receive comments from anonymous public workstations, whose users ordinarily could not use e-mail. Jon (the student, not the page) reads the mail and forwards it to the appropriate selector. JON also features a "[Selectors Page](#)," through which users can contact selectors directly via the same CGI script.

Comments on the posted titles are due April 15. By the time we deliver this paper, we'll know what happens next. We do intend to continue the journals review on a yearly cycle, and we have other plans for JON as well. No matter what happens, however, we can say with assurance that the world wide web has allowed us to make a difficult process less arduous, less time-consuming, and less confusing, not only for the Collection Development team but for all concerned. And we intend to use this powerful tool in the future for wide dissemination of information. We foresee much of our work and publications being kept up on our Collection Development web site.

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